THE FLOWER OF OLD JAPAN

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

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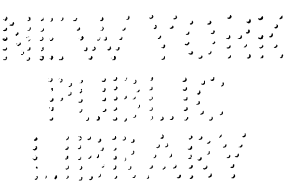
'O ciel! toute la Chine est par terre en morceaux!
Ce vase pâle et doux comme un reflet des eaux,
Couvert d'oiseaux, de fleurs, de fruits, et des mensonges
De ce vague idéal qui sort du bleu des songes,
Ce vase unique, étrange, impossible, engourdi,
Gardant sur lui le clair de lune en plein midi,
Qui paraissait vivant, ou luisait une flamme,
Qui semblait presque un monstre et semblait presque
une âme.'

—VICTOR HUGO (*Le Pot Cassé*).



To

CAROL

A Little Maiden

of Miyako

PREFACE

It is a perilous adventure — the writing of a preface, however brief, to one's own poems. For one may be tempted to re-state matters that could find their full elucidation only in the verses themselves. Tennyson once remarked that poetry is like shot silk, glancing with many colours; and any attempt to define its meanings is as great a mistake as the attempt of nineteenth-century materialism to enclose the infinite universe in its logical nut-shells. Through poetry alone, whether of deeds or words, thought or colour, passion or marble, is it possible to approach the Infinite, or as Blake did: —

> 'To see a world in a grain of sand,
> A heaven in a wild flower;
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
> And Eternity in an hour.'

But this revelation is the sole end and object of all true art; and I hope it may not be

thought presumptuous to say here simply that — whether the attempt be a success or a failure — it was especially my own aim in the two following poems. If the feet of childhood are set dancing in them, it was because as children we are best able to enter into that Kingdom of Dreams which is also the only true, the only real, Kingdom. The first tale, for instance, must not be taken to have any real relation to Japan. It belongs — as the *Spectator* put it — to the kind of dreamland which an imaginative child might construct out of the oddities of a willow-pattern plate, and it differs chiefly from Wonderlands of the Lewis Carrol type in a certain seriousness behind its fantasy. It is astonishing to me that these things require comment; but undoubtedly they do. For, on the one hand, the first tale has been praised enthusiastically as a vivid picture of Japan, and the author has not only had to correspond with Tokyo on the subject, but was also invited to meetings of the Japan Society in London! On the other hand, because the child-voices are allowed to declare that Tusitala lies asleep in that distant country of dreams, a prosaic English critic once wrote a lengthy review in

an important paper to point out my gross ignorance of the fact that Stevenson was really buried in Samoa! The tales are 'such stuff as dreams are made on'; but—as a kinder critic has remarked—'we ourselves are made of that stuff.' It is perhaps because these poems are almost light enough for a nonsense-book that I feel there is something in them more elemental, more essential, more worthy of serious consideration, than the most ponderous philosophical poem I could write. They are based on the fundamental and very simple mystery of the universe—that anything, even a grain of sand, should exist at all. If we could understand that, we could understand everything! Set clear of all irrelevancies, that is the simple problem that has been puzzling all the ages; and it is well sometimes to forget our accumulated 'knowledge' and return to it in all its childish *naïveté*. It is well to face that inconceivable miracle, that fundamental impossibility which happens to have been possible, that contradiction in terms, that fundamental paradox, for which we have at best only a cruciform symbol, with its arms pointing in opposite

directions and postulating, at once, an infinite God.

The inscription on the "Wisdom Looking-Glass"; the discovery by the children that the self-limitation of their little wishes was necessary not only to their own happiness, but to the harmony of the whole world; the development of the same idea in the passages leading up to the song — *What does it take to make a rose?* — where a *divine* act of loving self-limitation, an eternal self-sacrifice, an everlasting passion of the Godhead, such as perhaps was shadowed forth on Calvary, is found to be at the heart of the Universe, and to be — as it were — the highest aspect of the Paradox aforesaid, the living secret and price of our very existence; these things are only one twisted strand of the 'shot silk' out of which the two tales are woven. It is no new wisdom to regard these things through the eyes of little children; and I know — however insignificant they may be to others — these two tales contain as deep and true things as I, personally, have the power to express. I hope, therefore, that I may be pardoned, in these hurried days, for pointing out that the two poems are not to be

taken merely as fairy-tales, but as an attempt to follow the careless and happy feet of childhood back into the kingdom of those dreams which, as we said above, are the sole reality worth living and dying for; those beautiful dreams, or those fantastic jests—if any care to call them so—for which mankind has endured so many triumphant martyrdoms that even amidst the rush and roar of modern materialism they cannot be quite forgotten.

ALFRED NOYES.

PERSONS OF THE TALE

OURSELVES.

THE TALL THIN MAN.

THE DWARF BEHIND THE TWISTED PEAR-TREE.

CREEPING SIN.

THE MAD MOONSHEE.

THE NAMELESS ONE.

Pirates, Mandarins, Bonzes, Priests, Jugglers, Merchants, Ghastroi, Weirdrians, etc.

PRELUDE

You that have known the wonder zone
  Of islands far away;
You that have heard the dinky bird
  And roamed in rich Cathay;
You that have sailed o'er unknown seas
To woods of Amfalula trees
  Where craggy dragons play:
Oh, girl or woman, boy or man,
You've plucked the Flower of Old Japan!

Do you remember the blue stream;
  The bridge of pale bamboo;
The path that seemed a twisted dream
  Where everything came true;
The purple cherry-trees; the house

With jutting eaves below the boughs;
  The mandarins in blue,
With tiny, tapping, tilted toes,
And curious curved mustachios?

The road to Old Japan! you cry,
  And is it far or near?
Some never find it till they die;
  Some find it everywhere;
The road where restful Time forgets
His weary thoughts and wild regrets
  And calls the golden year
Back in a fairy dream to smile
On young and old a little while.

Some seek it with a blazing sword,
  And some with old blue plates;
Some with a miser's golden hoard;
  Some with a book of dates;
Some with a box of paints; a few

Whose loads of truth would ne'er pass through
  The first, white, fairy gates;
And, oh, how shocked they are to find
That truths are false when left behind!

Do you remember all the tales
  That Tusitala told,
When first we plunged thro' purple vales
  In quest of buried gold?
Do you remember how he said
That if we fell and hurt our head
  Our hearts must still be bold,
And we must never mind the pain
But rise up and go on again?

Do you remember? yes; I know
  You must remember still:
He left us, not so long ago,
  Carolling with a will,
Because he knew that he should lie

Under the comfortable sky
  Upon a lonely hill,
In Old Japan, when day was done;
"Dear Robert Louis Stevenson."

And there he knew that he should find
  The hills that haunt us now;
The whaups that cried upon the wind
  His heart remembered how;
And friends he loved and left, to roam
Far from the pleasant hearth of home,
  Should touch his dreaming brow;
Where fishes fly and birds have fins,
And children teach the mandarins.

Ah, let us follow, follow far
  Beyond the purple seas;
Beyond the rosy foaming bar,
  The coral reef, the trees,
The land of parrots, and the wild

That rolls before the fearless child
  Its ancient mysteries:
Onward and onward, if we can,
To Old Japan—to Old Japan.

PART I

EMBARKATION

When the firelight, red and clear,
  Flutters in the black wet pane,
It is very good to hear
  Howling winds and trotting rain:
It is very good indeed,
  When the nights are dark and cold,
Near the friendly hearth to read
  Tales of ghosts and buried gold.

So with cosy toes and hands
  We were dreaming, just like you;
Till we thought of palmy lands
  Coloured like a cockatoo;
All in drowsy nursery nooks
  Near the clutching fire we sat,

Searching quaint old story-books
  Piled upon the furry mat.

Something haunted us that night
  Like a half-remembered name;
Worn old pages in that light
  Seemed the same, yet not the same:
Curling in the pleasant heat
  Smoothly as a shell-shaped fan,
O! they breathed and smelt so sweet
  When we turned to Old Japan!

Suddenly we thought we heard
  Someone tapping on the wall,
Tapping, tapping like a bird,
  Till a panel seemed to fall
Quietly; and a tall thin man
  Stepped into the glimmering room,
And he held a little fan,
  And he waved it in the gloom.

Curious reds, and golds, and greens
  Danced before our startled eyes,
Birds from painted Indian screens,
  Beads, and shells, and dragon-flies;
Wings, and flowers, and scent, and flame,
  Fans and fish and heliotrope;
Till the magic air became
  Like a dream kaleidoscope.

Then he told us of a land
  Far across a fairy sea;
And he waved his thin white hand
  Like a flower, melodiously;
While a red and blue macaw
  Perched upon his pointed head,
And as in a dream, we saw
  All the curious things he said.

Tucked in tiny palanquins,
  Magically swinging there,

Flowery-kirtled mandarins
  Floated through the scented air;
Wandering dogs and prowling cats
  Grinned at fish in painted lakes;
Cross-legged conjurers on mats
  Fluted low to listening snakes.

Fat black bonzes on the shore
  Watched where singing, faint and far,
Boys in long blue garments bore
  Roses in a golden jar.
While at carven dragon ships
  Floating o'er that silent sea,
Squat-limbed gods with dreadful lips
  Leered and smiled mysteriously.

Like an idol, shrined alone,
  Watched by secret oval eyes,
Where the ruby wishing-stone
  Smouldering in the darkness lies,

Anyone that wanted things
  Touched the jewel and they came:
We were wealthier than kings
  If we could but do the same.

Yes; we knew a hundred ways
  We might use it if we could;
To be happy all our days
  As an Indian in a wood;
No more daily lesson task,
  No more sorrow, no more care;
So we thought that we would ask
  If he'd kindly lead us there.

Ah! but then he waved his fan,
  And he vanished through the wall;
Yet as in a dream, we ran
  Tumbling after, one and all;
Never pausing once to think,
  Panting after him we sped;

For we saw his robe of pink
  Floating backward as he fled.

Down a secret passage deep,
  Under roofs of spidery stairs,
Where the bat-winged nightmares creep,
  And a sheeted phantom glares
Rushed we; ah! how strange it was
  Where no human watcher stood;
Till we reached a gate of glass
  Opening on a flowery wood.

Where the rose-pink robe had flown,
  Borne by swifter feet than ours,
On to Wonder-Wander town,
  Through the wood of monstrous flowers;
Mailed in monstrous gold and blue
  Dragon-flies like peacocks fled;
Butterflies like carpets, too,
  Softly fluttered overhead.

Down the valley, tip-a-toe,
  Where the broad-limbed giants lie
Snoring, as when long ago
  Jack on a bean-stalk scaled the sky;
Slowly, softly towards the town
  Stole we past old dreams again,
Castles long since battered down,
  Dungeons of forgotten pain.

Noonday brooded on the wood,
  Evening caught us ere we crept
Where a twisted pear-tree stood,
  And a dwarf behind it slept;
Round his scraggy throat he wore,
  Knotted tight, a scarlet scarf;
Timidly we watched him snore,
  For he seemed a surly dwarf.

Yet, he looked so very small,
  He could hardly hurt us much;

We were nearly twice as tall,
  So we woke him with a touch
Gently, and in tones polite,
  Asked him to direct our path;
O! his wrinkled eyes grew bright
  Green with ugly gnomish wrath.

    He seemed to choke,
    And gruffly spoke,
"You're lost: deny it, if you can!
    You want to know
    The way to go?
There's no such place as Old Japan.

    "You want to seek —
    No, no, don't speak!
You mean you want to steal a fan.
    You want to see
    The fields of tea?
They don't grow tea in Old Japan.

"In China, well
Perhaps you'd smell
The cherry bloom: that's if you ran
A million miles
And jumped the stiles,
And never dreamed of Old Japan.

"What, palanquins,
And mandarins?
And, what d'you say, a blue divan?
And what? Hee! hee!
You'll never see
A pig-tailed head in Old Japan.

"You'd take away
The ruby, hey?
I never heard of such a plan!
Upon my word
It's quite absurd
There's not a gem in Old Japan!

"Oh, dear me, no!
You'd better go
Straight home again, my little man:
Ah, well, you'll see
But don't blame me;
I don't believe in Old Japan."

Then, before we could obey,
O'er our startled heads he cast,
Spider-like, a webby grey
Net that held us prisoned fast;
How we screamed, he only grinned,
It was such a lonely place;
And he said we should be pinned
In his human beetle-case.

Out he dragged a monstrous box
From a cave behind the tree!
It had four-and-twenty locks,
But he could not find the key,

And his face grew very pale
  When a sudden voice began
Drawing nearer through the vale,
  Singing songs of Old Japan.

Song

Satin sails in a crimson dawn
  Over the silky silver sea;
Purple veils of the dark withdrawn;
  Heavens of pearl and porphyry;
Purple and white in the morning light
  Over the water the town we knew,
In tiny state, like a willow-plate,
  Shone, and behind it the hills were blue.

There, we remembered, the shadows pass
  All day long like dreams in the night;
There, in the meadows of dim blue grass,
  Crimson daisies are ringed with white;

There the roses flutter their petals,
Over the meadows they take their flight,
There the moth that sleepily settles
Turns to a flower in the warm soft light.

There when the sunset colours the streets
Everyone buys at wonderful stalls
Toys and chocolates, guns and sweets,
Ivory pistols, and Persian shawls:
Everyone's pockets are crammed with gold;
Nobody's heart is worn with care,
Nobody ever grows tired and old,
And nobody calls you "Baby" there.

There with a hat like a round white dish
Upside down on each pig-tailed head,
Jugglers offer you snakes and fish,
Dreams and dragons and gingerbread;
Beautiful books with marvellous pictures,
Painted pirates and streaming gore,

And everyone reads, without any strictures,
Tales he remembers for evermore.

There when the dim blue daylight lingers
Listening, and the West grows holy,
Singers crouch with their long white fingers
Floating over the zithern slowly:
Paper lamps with a peachy bloom
Burn above on the dim blue bough,
While the zitherns gild the gloom
With curious music! I hear it now!

Now: and at that mighty word
Holding out his magic fan,
Through the waving flowers appeared,
Suddenly, the tall thin man:
And we saw the crumpled dwarf
Trying to hide behind the tree,
But his knotted scarlet scarf
Made him very plain to see.

Like a soft and smoky cloud
  Passed the webby net away;
While its owner squealing loud
  Down behind the pear-tree lay;
For the tall thin man came near,
  And his words were dark and gruff,
And he swung the dwarf in the air
  By his long and scraggy scruff.

There he kickled whimpering.
  But our rescuer touched the box,
Open with a sudden spring
  Clashed the four-and-twenty locks;
Then he crammed the dwarf inside,
  And the locks all clattered tight:
Four-and-twenty times he tried
  Whether they were fastened right.

Ah, he led us on our road,
  Showed us Wonder-Wander town;

Then he fled: behind him flowed
  Once again the rose-pink gown:
Down the long deserted street,
  All the windows winked like eyes,
And our little trotting feet
  Echoed to the starry skies.

Low and long for evermore
  Where the Wonder-Wander sea
Whispers to the wistful shore
  Purple songs of mystery,
Down the shadowy quay we came —
  Though it hides behind the hill
You will find it just the same
  And the seamen singing still.

There we chose a ship of pearl,
  And her milky silken sail
Seemed by magic to unfurl,
  Puffed before a fairy gale;

Shimmering o'er the purple deep,
  Out across the silvery bar,
Softly as the wings of sleep
  Sailed we towards the morning star.

Over us the skies were dark,
  Yet we never needed light;
Softly shone our tiny bark
  Gliding through the solemn night;
Softly bright our moony gleam,
  Glimmered o'er the glistening waves,
Like a cold sea-maiden's dream
  Globed in twilit ocean caves.

So all night our shallop passed
  Many a haunt of old desire,
Blurs of savage blossom massed
  Red above a pirate-fire;
Huts that gloomed and glanced among
  Fruitage dipping in the blue;

Songs the sirens never sung,
  Shores Ulysses never knew.

All our fairy rigging shone
  Richly as a rainbow seen
Where the moonlight floats upon
  Gossamers of gold and green:
All the tiny spars were bright;
  Beaten gold the bowsprit was;
But our pilot was the night,
  And our chart a looking-glass.

PART II

THE ARRIVAL

WITH rosy finger-tips the Dawn
  Drew back the silver veils,
Till lilac shimmered into lawn
  Above the satin sails;
And o'er the waters, white and wan,
  In tiny patterned state,
We saw the streets of Old Japan
  Shine, like a willow plate.

O, many a milk-white pigeon roams
  The purple cherry crops,
The mottled miles of pearly domes,
  And blue pagoda tops,
The river with its golden canes
  And dark piratic dhows,

To where beyond the twisting vanes
  The burning mountain glows.

A snow-peak in the silver skies
  Beyond that magic world,
We saw the great volcano rise
  With incense o'er it curled,
Whose tiny thread of rose and blue
  Has risen since time began,
Before the first enchanter knew
  The peak of Old Japan.

Nobody watched us quietly steer
The pinnace to the painted pier,
  Except one pig-tailed mandarin,
Who sat upon a chest of tea
Pretending not to hear or see! . . .
  His hands were very long and thin,

His face was very broad and white;
And O, it was a fearful sight
  To see him sit alone and grin!

His grin was very sleek and sly:
Timidly we passed him by!
  He did not seem at all to care:
So, thinking we were safely past,
We ventured to look back at last.
  O, dreadful blank! — *He was not there!*
He must have hid behind his chest:
We did not stay to see the rest.

But, as in reckless haste we ran,
We came upon the tall thin man,
Who called to us and waved his fan,
  And offered us his palanquin:
He said we must not go alone
To seek the ruby wishing-stone,
  Because the white-faced mandarin

Would dog our steps for many a mile,
And sit upon each purple stile
Before we came to it, and smile
And smile; his name was Creeping Sin.

He played with children's beating hearts,
And stuck them full of poisoned darts
  And long green thorns that stabbed and stung:
He'd watch until we tried to speak,
Then thrust inside his pasty cheek
  His long, white, slimy tongue:
And smile at everything we said;
And sometimes pat us on the head,
  And say that we were very young:
He was a cousin of the man
Who said that there was no Japan.

And night and day this Creeping Sin
Would follow the path of the palanquin;
  Yet if we still were fain to touch

The ruby, we must have no fear,
Whatever we might see or hear,
And the tall thin man would take us there;
  He did not fear that Sly One much,
Except perhaps on a moonless night,
Nor even then if the stars were bright.

So, in the yellow palankeen
We swung along in state between
Twinkling domes of gold and green
  Through the rich bazaar,
Where the cross-legged merchants sat,
Old and almond-eyed and fat,
Each upon a gorgeous mat,
  Each in a cymar;
Each in crimson samite breeches,
Watching his barbaric riches.

Cherry blossom breathing sweet

Whispered o'er the dim blue street
Where with fierce uncertain feet
  Tawny pirates walk:
All in belts and baggy blouses,
Out of dreadful opium houses,
Out of dens where Death carouses,
  Horribly they stalk;
Girt with ataghan and dagger,
Right across the road they swagger.

And where the cherry orchards blow,
We saw the maids of Miyako,
Swaying softly to and fro
  Through the dimness of the dance:
Like sweet thoughts that shine through dreams
They glided, wreathing rosy gleams,
With stately sounds of silken streams,
  And many a slim kohl-lidded glance;
Then fluttered with tiny rose-bud feet

To a soft *frou-frou* and a rhythmic beat
As the music shimmered, pursuit, retreat,
"Hands across, retire, advance!"
And again it changed and the glimmering throng
Faded into a distant song.

Song

The maidens of Miyako
Dance in the sunset hours,
Deep in the sunset glow,
Under the cherry flowers.

With dreamy hands of pearl
Floating like butterflies,
Dimly the dancers whirl
As the rose light dies;

And their floating gowns, their hair
Upbound with curious pins,

Fade thro' the darkening air
With the dancing mandarins.

And then, as we went, the tall thin man
Explained the manners of Old Japan;
If you pitied a thing, you pretended to sneer;
Yet if you were glad you ran to buy
A captive pigeon and let it fly;
And, if you were sad, you took a spear
To wound yourself, for fear your pain
Should quietly grow less again.

And, again he said, if we wished to find
The mystic City that enshrined
The stone so few on earth had found,
We must be very brave; it lay
A hundred haunted leagues away,
Past many a griffon-guarded ground,
In depths of dark and curious art,

Where passion-flowers enfold apart
The Temple of the Flaming Heart,
  The City of the Secret Wound.

About the fragrant fall of day
We saw beside the twisted way
  A blue-domed tea-house, bossed with gold;
Hungry and thirsty we entered in:
How should we know what Creeping Sin
  Had breathed in that Emperor's ear who sold
His own dumb soul for an evil jewel
To the earth-gods, blind and ugly and cruel? . . .
  We drank sweet tea as his tale was told,
In a garden of blue chrysanthemums,
While a drowsy swarming of gongs and drums
  Out of the sunset dreamily rolled.

But, as the murmur nearer drew,
A fat black bonze, in a robe of blue,
  Suddenly at the gate appeared;

And close behind, with that evil grin,
Was it Creeping Sin, was it Creeping Sin?
  The bonze looked quietly down and sneered.
Our guide! Was he sleeping? We could not
    wake him,
However we tried to pinch and shake him!

Nearer, nearer the tumult came,
Till, as a glare of sound and flame,
  Blind from a terrible furnace door
Blares, or the mouth of a dragon, blazed
The seething gateway: deaf and dazed
  With the clanging and the wild uproar
We stood; while a thousand oval eyes
Gapped our fear with a sick surmise.

Then, as the dead sea parted asunder,
The clamour clove with a sound of thunder
  In two great billows; and all was quiet.
Gaunt and black was the palankeen

That came in dreadful state between
  The frozen waves of the wild-eyed riot
Curling back from the breathless track
Of the Nameless One who is never seen:
  The close drawn curtains were thick and black;
But wizen and white was the tall thin man
  As he rose in his sleep:
His eyes were closed, his lips were wan,
  He crouched like a leopard that dares not leap.

The bearers halted: the tall thin man,
Fearfully dreaming, waved his fan,
  With wizard fingers, to and fro;
While, with a whimper of evil glee,
The Nameless Emperor's mad Moonshee
  Stepped in front of us: dark and slow
Were the words of the doom that he dared not
    name;
But, over the ground, as he spoke, there came

Tiny circles of soft blue flame;
  Like ghosts of flowers they began to glow,
And flow like a moonlit brook between
Our feet and the terrible palankeen.

But the Moonshee wrinkled his long thin eyes,
And sneered, "Have you stolen the strength of
    the skies?
  Then pour before us a stream of pearl!
Give us the pearl and the gold we know,
And our hearts will be softened and let you go;
  But these are toys for a foolish girl —
These vanishing blossoms—what are they worth?
They are not so heavy as dust and earth:
  Pour before us a stream of pearl!"

Then, with a wild strange laugh, our guide
Stretched his arms to the West and cried
  Once, and a song came over the sea;

And all the blossoms of moon-soft fire
Woke and breathed as a wind-swept lyre,
  And the garden surged into harmony;
Till it seemed that the soul of the whole world
    sung,
And every petal became a tongue
  To tell the thoughts of Eternity.

But the Moonshee lifted his painted brows
And stared at the gold on the blue tea-house:
  "Can you clothe your body with dreams?"
    he sneered;
"If you taught us the truths that we always
    know
Our heart might be softened and let you go:
  Can you tell us the length of a monkey's
    beard,
Or the weight of the gems on the Emperor's fan,
Or the number of parrots in Old Japan?"

And again, with a wild strange laugh, our guide
Looked at him; and he shrunk aside,
  Shrivelling like a flame-touched leaf;
For the red-cross blossoms of soft blue fire
Were growing and fluttering higher and
    higher,
  Shaking their petals out, sheaf by sheaf,
Till with disks like shields and stems like towers
Burned the host of the passion-flowers
  . . . Had the Moonshee flown like a midnight
    thief?
. . . Yet a thing like a monkey, shrivelled and
    black,
Chattered and danced as they forced him back.

As the coward chatters for empty pride,
  In the face of a foe that he cannot but fear,
It chattered and leapt from side to side,
  And its voice rang strangely upon the ear.

As the cry of a wizard that dares not own
Another's brighter and mightier throne;
As the wrath of a fool that rails aloud
On the fire that burnt him; the brazen bray
Clamoured and rang o'er the gaping crowd,
And flapped like a gabbling goose away.

The Cry of the Mad Moonshee

If the blossoms were beans,
I should know what it means —
This blaze, which I certainly cannot endure;
It is evil, too,
For its colour is blue,
And the sense of the matter is quite obscure.
Celestial truth
Is the food of youth;
But the music was dark as a moonless night.

The facts in the song
Were all of them wrong,
And there was not a single sum done right;
Tho' a metaphysician amongst the crowd,
In a voice that was notably deep and loud,
Repeated, as fast as he was able,
The whole of the multiplication table.

So the cry flapped off as a wild goose flies,
And the stars came out in the trembling skies,
And ever the mystic glory grew
In the garden of blue chrysanthemums,
Till there came a rumble of distant drums;
And the multitude suddenly turned and flew.
. . . A dead ape lay where their feet had been . . .
And we called for the yellow palankeen,
And the flowers divided and let us through.

The black-barred moon was large and low
When we came to the Forest of Ancient Woe;
  And over our heads the stars were bright.
But through the forest the path we travelled
Its phosphorescent aisle unravelled
  In one thin ribbon of dwindling light:
And twice and thrice on the fainting track
We paused to listen. The moon grew black,
  But the coolies' faces glimmered white,
As the wild woods echoed in dreadful chorus
A laugh that came horribly hopping o'er us
  Like monstrous frogs thro' the murky night.

Then the tall thin man as we swung along
Sang us an old enchanted song
  That lightened our hearts of their fearful load.
But, e'en as the moonlit air grew sweet,
We heard the pad of stealthy feet
  Dogging us down the thin white road;

And the song grew weary again and harsh,
And the black trees dripped like the fringe of a
marsh,
And a laugh crept out like a shadowy toad;
And we knew it was neither ghoul nor djinn:
It was Creeping Sin! It was Creeping Sin!

But we came to a bend, and the white moon
glowed
Like a gate at the end of the narrowing road
Far away; and on either hand,
As guards of a path to the heart's desire,
The strange tall blossoms of soft blue fire
Stretched away thro' that unknown land,
League on league with their dwindling lane
Down to the large low moon; and again
There shimmered around us that mystical strain,
In a tongue that it seemed we could under-
stand.

Song

Hold by right and rule by fear
Till the slowly broadening sphere
Melting through the skies above
Merge into the sphere of love.

Hold by might until you find
Might is powerless o'er the mind:
Hold by Truth until you see,
Though they bow before the wind,
Its towers can mock at liberty.

Time, the seneschal, is blind;
Time is blind: and what are we?
Captives of Infinity,
Claiming through Truth's prison bars
Kinship with the wandering stars.

O, who could tell the wild weird sights
We saw in all the days and nights
  We travelled through those forests old.
We saw the griffons on white cliffs,
  Among fantastic hieroglyphs,
  Guarding enormous heaps of gold:
We saw the Ghastroi — curious men
Who dwell, like tigers, in a den,
  And howl whene'er the moon is cold;
They stripe themselves with red and black
And ride upon the yellow Yak.

Their dens are always ankle-deep
With twisted knives, and in their sleep
  They often cut themselves; they say
That if you wish to live in peace
The surest way is not to cease
  Collecting knives; and never a day
Can pass, unless they buy a few;

And as their enemies buy them too
  They all avert the impending fray,
And starve their children and their wives
To buy the necessary knives.

* * * * *

The forest leapt with shadowy shapes
As we came to the great black Tower of
    Apes:
But we gave them purple figs and grapes
  In alabaster amphoras:
We gave them curious kinds of fruit
With betel nuts and orris-root,
  And then they let us pass:
And when we reached the Tower of Snakes
We gave them soft white honey-cakes,
  And warm sweet milk in bowls of brass:
And on the hundredth eve we found
The City of the Secret Wound.

We saw the mystic blossoms blow
Round the City, far below;
Faintly in the sunset glow
We saw the soft blue glory flow
  O'er many a golden garden gate:
And o'er the tiny dark green seas
Of tamarisks and tulip-trees,
Domes like golden oranges
  Dream aloft elate.

And clearer, clearer as we went,
We heard from tower and battlement
A whisper, like a warning, sent
  From watchers out of sight;
And clearer, brighter, as we drew
Close to the walls, we saw the blue
Flashing of plumes where peacocks flew
  Thro' zones of pearly light.

On either side, a fat black bonze
Guarded the gates of red-wrought bronze,
Blazoned with blue sea-dragons
  And mouths of yawning flame;
Down the road of dusty red,
Though their brown feet ached and bled,
Our coolies went with joyful tread:
Like living fans the gates outspread
  And opened as we came.

PART III

THE MYSTIC RUBY

THE white moon dawned; the sunset died;
And stars were trembling when we spied
  The rose-red temple of our dreams:
Its lamp-lit gardens glimmered cool
With many an onyx-paven pool,
  Amid soft sounds of flowing streams;
Where star-shine shimmered through the white
Tall fountain-shafts of crystal light
  In ever changing rainbow-gleams.

Priests in flowing yellow robes
Glided under rosy globes;
  Through the green pomegranate boughs
Moonbeams poured their coloured rain;

Roofs of sea-green porcelain
  Jutted o'er the rose-red house;
Bells were hung beneath its eaves;
Every wind that stirred the leaves
  Tinkled as tired water does.

The temple had a low broad base
Of black bright marble; all its face
  Was marble bright in rosy bloom;
And where two sea-green pillars rose
Deep in the flower-soft eave-shadows
  We saw, thro' richly sparkling gloom,
Wrought in marvellous years of old
With bulls and peacocks bossed in gold,
  The doors of powdered lacquer loom.

Quietly then the tall thin man,
Holding his turquoise-tinted fan,
  Alighted from the palanquin;

We followed: never painter dreamed
Of how that dark rich temple gleamed
  With gules of jewelled gloom within;
And as we wondered near the door
A priest came o'er the polished floor
  In sandals of soft serpent-skin;
His mitre shimmered bright and blue
With pigeon's breast-plumes. When he knew
  Our quest he stroked his broad white chin,
And looked at us with slanting eyes
And smiled; then through his deep disguise
We knew him! It was Creeping Sin!

But cunningly he bowed his head
Down on his gilded breast and said
  Come: and he led us through the dusk
Of passages whose painted walls

Gleamed with dark old festivals;
  Till where the gloom grew sweet with musk
And incense, through a door of amber
We came into a high-arched chamber.

There on a throne of jasper sat
A monstrous idol, black and fat;
  Thick rose-oil dropped upon its head:
Drop by drop, heavy and sweet,
Trickled down to its ebon feet
  Whereon the blood of goats was shed,
And smeared around its perfumed knees
In savage midnight mysteries.

It wore about its bulging waist
A belt of dark green bronze enchased
  With big, soft, cloudy pearls; its wrists
Were clasped about with moony gems
Gathered from dead kings' diadems;
  Its throat was ringed with amethysts,

And in its awful hand it held
A softly smouldering emerald.

Silkily murmured Creeping Sin,
"This is the stone you wished to win!"
  "White Snake," replied the tall thin
    man,
"Show us the Ruby Stone, or I
Will slay thee with my hands." The sly
  Long eyelids of the priest began
To slant aside; and then once more
He led us through the fragrant door.

And now along the passage walls
Were painted hideous animals,
  With hooded eyes and cloven stings:
In the incense that like shadowy hair
Streamed over them they seemed to stir
  Their craggy claws and crooked wings.

At last we saw strange moon-wreaths curl
Around a deep, soft porch of pearl.

O, what enchanter wove in dreams
That chapel wild with shadowy gleams
  And prismy colours of the moon?
Shrined like a rainbow in a mist
Of flowers, the fretted amethyst
  Arches rose to a mystic tune;
And never mortal art inlaid
Those cloudy floors of sea-soft jade.

There, in the midst, an idol rose
White as the silent starlit snows
  On lonely Himalayan heights:
Over its head the spikenard spilled
Down to its feet, with myrrh distilled
  In distant, odorous Indian nights:
It held before its ivory face
A flaming yellow chrysoprase.

O, silkily murmured Creeping Sin,
"This is the stone you wished to win."
  But in his ear the tall thin man
Whispered with slow, strange lips — we
    knew
Not what, but Creeping Sin went blue
  With fear; again his eyes began
To slant aside; then through the porch
He passed, and lit a tall, brown torch.

Down a corridor dark as death,
With beating hearts and bated breath
  We hurried; far away we heard
A dreadful hissing, fierce as fire
When rain begins to quench a pyre;
  And where the smoky torch-light flared
Strange vermin beat their bat-like wings,
And the wet walls dropped with slimy
    things.

And darker, darker, wound the way,
Beyond all gleams of night and day,
  And still that hideous hissing grew
Louder and louder on our ears,
And tortured us with eyeless fears;
  Then suddenly the gloom turned blue,
And, in the wall, a rough rock cave
Gaped, like a phosphorescent grave.

And from the purple mist within
There came a wild tumultuous din
  Of snakes that reared their heads and hissed
As if a witch's cauldron boiled;
All round the door great serpents coiled,
  With eyes of glowing amethyst,
Whose fierce blue flames began to slide
Like shooting stars from side to side.

Ah! with a sickly gasping grin
And quivering eyelids, Creeping Sin
  Stole to the cave; but, suddenly,
As through its glimmering mouth he passed,
The serpents flashed and gripped him fast:
  He wriggled and gave one awful cry,
Then all at once the cave was cleared;
The snakes with their victim had disappeared.

And fearlessly the tall thin man
Opened his turquoise-tinted fan
  And entered; and the mists grew bright,
And we saw that the cave was a diamond hall
Lit with lamps for a festival.
  A myriad globes of coloured light
Went gliding deep in its massy sides,
Like the shimmering moons in the glassy tides
  Where a sea-king's palace enchants the night.

Gliding and flowing, a glory and wonder,
Through each other, and over, and under,
  The lucent orbs of green and gold,
Bright with sorrow or soft with sleep,
In music through the glimmering deep,
  Over their secret axles rolled,
And circled by the murmuring spheres
We saw in a frame of frozen tears
  A mirror that made the blood run cold.

For, when we came to it, we found
It imaged everything around
  Except the face that gazed in it;
And where the mirrored face should be
A heart-shaped Ruby fierily
  Smouldered; and round the frame was
    writ,
Mystery: Time and Tide shall pass,
I am the Wisdom Looking-Glass.

This is the Ruby none can touch:
Many have loved it overmuch;
Its fathomless fires flutter and sigh,
Being as images of the flame
That shall make earth and heaven the same
When the fire of the end reddens the sky,
And the world consumes like a burning pall,
Till where there is nothing, there is all.

So we looked up at the tall thin man
And we saw that his face grew sad and wan:
Tears were glistening in his eyes:
At last, with a breaking sob, he bent
His head upon his breast and went
Swiftly away! With dreadful cries
We rushed to the softly glimmering door
And stared at the hideous corridor
But his robe was gone as a dream that flies:

Back to the glass in terror we came,
And stared at the writing round the frame.

We could not understand one word:
And suddenly we thought we heard
  The hissing of the snakes again:
How could we front them all alone?
O, madly we clutched at the mirrored stone
  And wished we were back on the flowery
    plain:
And swifter than thought and swift as fear
The whole world flashed, and behold we were
    there.

Yes; there was the port of Old Japan,
With its twisted patterns, white and wan,
Shining like a mottled fan
  Spread by the blue sea, faint and far;
And far away we heard once more

A sound of singing on the shore,
Where boys in blue kimonos bore
  Roses in a golden jar:
And we heard, where the cherry orchards blow,
The serpent-charmers fluting low,
And the song of the maidens of Miyako.

And at our feet unbroken lay
The glass that had whirled us thither away:
  And in the grass, among the flowers
We sat and wished all sorts of things:
O, we were wealthier than kings!
  We ruled the world for several hours!
And then, it seemed, we knew not why,
All the daisies began to die.

We wished them alive again; but soon
The trees all fled up towards the moon
  Like peacocks through the sunlit air:

And the butterflies flapped into silver fish;
And each wish spoiled another wish;
  Till we threw the glass down in despair;
For, getting whatever you want to get,
Is like drinking tea from a fishing net.

At last we thought we'd wish once more
That all should be as it was before;
  And then we'd shatter the glass, if we could;
But just as the world grew right again,
We heard a wanderer out on the plain
  Singing what none of us understood;
Yet we thought that the world grew thrice more
    sweet
And the meadows were blossoming under his feet.

And we felt a grand and beautiful fear,
For we knew that a marvellous thought drew
    near;
  So we kept the glass for a little while:

And the skies grew deeper and twice as bright,
And the seas grew soft as a flower of light,
  And the meadows rippled from stile to stile;
And memories danced in a musical throng
Thro' the blossom that scented the wonderful
    song.

Song

We sailed across the silver seas
  And saw the sea-blue bowers,
We saw the purple cherry trees,
  And all the foreign flowers,
We travelled in a palanquin
  Beyond the caravan,
And yet our hearts had never seen
  The Flower of Old Japan.

The Flower above all other flowers,
  The Flower that never dies;

Before whose throne the scented hours
Offer their sacrifice;
The Flower that here on earth below
Reveals the heavenly plan;
But only little children know
The Flower of Old Japan.

There, in the dim blue flowery plain
We wished with the magic glass again
To go to the Flower of the song's desire:
And o'er us the whole of the soft blue sky
Flashed like fire as the world went by,
And far beneath us the sea like fire
Flashed in one swift blue brilliant stream,
And the journey was done, like a change in a dream.

PART IV

THE END OF THE QUEST

LIKE the dawn upon a dream
  Slowly through the scented gloom
Crept once more the ruddy gleam
  O'er the friendly nursery room.
There, before our waking eyes,
  Large and ghostly, white and dim,
Dreamed the Flower that never dies,
  Opening wide its rosy rim.

Spreading like a ghostly fan,
  Petals white as porcelain,
There the Flower of Old Japan
  Told us we were home again;

For a soft and curious light
  Suddenly was o'er it shed,
And we saw it was a white
  English daisy, ringed with red.

Slowly, as a wavering mist
  Waned the wonder out of sight,
To a sigh of amethyst,
  To a wraith of scented light.
Flower and magic glass had gone;
  Near the clutching fire we sat
Dreaming, dreaming, all alone,
  Each upon a furry mat.

While the firelight, red and clear,
  Fluttered in the black wet pane,
It was very good to hear
  Howling winds and trotting rain.
For we found at last we knew
  More than all our fancy planned.

All the fairy tales were true,
  And home the heart of fairyland.

EPILOGUE

Carol, every violet has
Heaven for a looking-glass!

Every little valley lies
Under many-clouded skies;
Every little cottage stands
Girt about with boundless lands;
Every little glimmering pond
Claims the mighty shores beyond;
Shores no seaman ever hailed,
Seas no ship has ever sailed.

All the shores when day is done
Fade into the setting sun,

So the story tries to teach
More than can be told in speech.

Beauty is a fading flower,
Truth is but a wizard's tower,
Where a solemn death-bell tolls,
And a forest round it rolls.

We have come by curious ways
To the Light that holds the days;
We have sought in haunts of fear
For that all-enfolding sphere:
And lo! it was not far, but near.

We have found, O foolish-fond,
The shore that has no shore beyond.

Deep in every heart it lies
With its untranscended skies;

For what heaven should bend above
Hearts that own the heaven of love?

Carol, Carol, we have come
Back to heaven, back to home.

FOREST OF WILD THYME

To

HELEN, ROSIE

and

BEATRIX

APOLOGIA

Critics, you have been so kind,
I would not have you think me blind
  To all the wisdom that you preach;
Yet before I strictlier run
  In straiter lines of chiselled speech,
Give me one more hour, just one
  Hour to hunt the fairy gleam
  That flutters through this childish dream.

It mocks me as it flies, I know:
All too soon the gleam will go;
  Yet I love it and shall love
My dream that brooks no narrower bars
  Than bind the darkening heavens above,

My Jack o'Lanthorn of the stars:

Then, I'll follow it no more,

I'll light the lamp: I'll close the door.

PRELUDE

HUSH! if you remember how we sailed to old Japan,
Peterkin was with us then, our little brother Peterkin!
Now we've lost him, so they say: I think the tall thin man
Must have come and touched him with his curious twinkling fan
And taken him away again, our merry little Peterkin;
He'll be frightened all alone; we'll find him if we can;
Come and look for Peterkin, poor little Peterkin.

No one would believe us if we told them
what we know,
Or they wouldn't grieve for Peterkin, merry
little Peterkin;
If they'd only watched us roaming through
the streets of Miyako,
And travelling in a palanquin where parents
never go,
And seen the golden gardens where we
wandered once with Peterkin,
And smelt the purple orchards where the
cherry-blossoms blow,
They wouldn't mourn for Peterkin, merry
little Peterkin.

Put away your muskets, lay aside the
drum,
Hang it by the wooden sword we made for
little Peterkin!

He was once our trumpeter, now his bugle's dumb,
Pile your arms beneath it, for the owlet light is come,
We'll wander through the roses where we marched of old with Peterkin,
We'll search the summer sunset where the Hybla beehives hum,
And — if we meet a fairy there — we'll ask for news of Peterkin.

He was once our cabin-boy and cooked the sweets for tea;
And O, we've sailed around the world with laughing little Peterkin;
From nursery floor to pantry door we've roamed the mighty sea,
And come to port below the stairs in distant Caribee,

But wheresoe'er we sailed we took our little lubber Peterkin,
Because his wide grey eyes believed much more than ours could see,
And so we liked our Peterkin, our trusty little Peterkin.

Peterkin, Peterkin, I think if you came back
The captain of our host to-day should be the bugler Peterkin,
And he should lead our smugglers up that steep and narrow track,
A band of noble brigands, bearing each a mighty pack
Crammed with lace and jewels to the secret cave of Peterkin,
And he should wear the biggest boots and make his pistol crack, —

The Spanish cloak, the velvet mask, we'd
give them all to Peterkin.
Come, my brother pirates, I am tired of play;
Come and look for Peterkin, little brother
Peterkin,
Our merry little comrade that the fairies took
away,
For people think we've lost him, and when we
come to say
Our good-night prayers to mother, if we pray
for little Peterkin
Her eyes are very sorrowful, she turns her
head away.
Come and look for Peterkin, merry little
Peterkin.

God bless little Peterkin, wherever he may be!
Come and look for Peterkin, lonely little
Peterkin:

I wonder if they've taken him again across the sea
From the town of Wonder-Wander and the Amfalula tree
To the land of many marvels where we roamed of old with Peterkin,
The land of blue pagodas and the flowery fields of tea!
Come and look for Peterkin, poor little Peterkin.

PART I

THE SPLENDID SECRET

Now father stood engaged in talk
With mother on that narrow walk
Between the laurels (where we play
At Red-skins lurking for their prey)
And the grey old wall of roses
Where the Persian kitten dozes
And the sunlight sleeps upon
Crannies of the crumbling stone
— So hot it is you scarce can bear
Your naked hand upon it there,
Though there luxuriating in heat
With a slow and gorgeous beat
White-winged currant-moths display
Their spots of black and gold all day. —

Well, since we greatly wished to know
Whether we too might some day go
Where little Peterkin had gone
Without one word and all alone,
We crept up through the laurels there
Hoping that we might overhear
The splendid secret, darkly great,
Of Peterkin's mysterious fate;
And on what high adventure bound
He left our pleasant garden-ground,
Whether for old Japan once more
He voyaged from the dim blue shore,
Or whether he set out to run
By candle-light to Babylon.

We just missed something father said
About a young prince that was dead,
A little warrior that had fought
And failed: how hopes were brought to nought

He said, and mortals made to bow
  Before the Juggernaut of Death,
And all the world was darker now,
  For Time's grey lips and icy breath
Had blown out all the enchanted lights
That burned in Love's Arabian nights;
And now he could not understand
Mother's mystic fairy-land,
"Land of the dead, poor fairy-tale,"
He murmured, and her face grew pale,
And then with great soft shining eyes
She leant to him — she looked so wise —
And, with her cheek against his cheek,
We heard her, ah so softly, speak.

"Husband, there was a happy day,
Long ago, in love's young May,
When with a wild-flower in your hand
  You echoed that dead poet's cry —

'Little flower, but if I could understand!'
And you saw it had roots in the depths of
the sky,
And there in that smallest bud lay furled
The secret and meaning of all the world."

He shook his head and then he tried
To kiss her, but she only cried
And turned her face away and said,
"You come between me and my dead!
His soul is near me, night and day,
But you would drive it far away;
And you shall never kiss me now
Until you lift that brave old brow
Of faith I know so well; or else
Refute the tale the skylark tells,
Tarnish the glory of that May,
Explain the Smallest Flower away."
And still he said, "Poor fairy-tales,

How terribly their starlight pales
Before the solemn sun of truth
That rises o'er the grave of youth!"

"Is heaven a fairy-tale?" she said, —
And once again he shook his head;
And yet we ne'er could understand
Why heaven should *not* be fairy-land,
A part of heaven at least, and why
The thought of it made mother cry,
And why they went away so sad,
  And father still quite unforgiven,
For what could children be but glad
  To find a fairy-land in heaven?

And as we talked it o'er we found
Our brains were really spinning round;
But Dick, our eldest, late returned
From school, by all the lore he'd learned
Declared that we should seek the lost

Smallest Flower at any cost.
For, since within its leaves lay furled
The secret of the whole wide world,
He thought that we might learn therein
The whereabouts of Peterkin;
And, if we found the Flower, we knew
Father would be forgiven, too;
And mother's kiss atone for all
The quarrel by the rose-hung wall;
We knew not how, we knew not why,
But Dick it was who bade us try,
Dick made it all seem plain and clear,
And Dick it is who helps us here
To tell this tale of fairy-land
In words we scarce can understand.
For ere another golden hour
  Had passed, our anxious parents found
  We'd left the scented garden-ground
To seek — the Smallest Flower.

PART II

THE FIRST DISCOVERY

Oh, grown-ups cannot understand
  And grown-ups never will,
How short's the way to fairy-land
  Across the purple hill:
They smile: their smile is very bland,
  Their eyes are wise and chill;
And yet — at just a child's command —
  The world's an Eden still.

Under the cloudy lilac-tree,
  Out at the garden-gate,
We stole, a little band of three,
  To tempt our fairy fate.
There was no human eye to see,

No voice to bid us wait;
The gardener had gone home to tea,
The hour was very late.

I wonder if you've ever dreamed,
In summer's noonday sleep,
Of what the thyme and heather seemed
To ladybirds that creep
Like little crimson shimmering gems
Between the tiny twisted stems
Of fairy forests deep;
And what it looks like as they pass
Through jungles of the golden grass.

If you could suddenly become
As small a thing as they,
A midget-child, a new Tom Thumb,
A little gauze-winged fay,
Oh then, as through the mighty shades

Of wild thyme woods and violet glades
  You groped your forest-way,
How fraught each fragrant bough would be
With dark o'erhanging mystery.
How high the forest aisles would loom,
  What wondrous wings would beat
Through gloamings loaded with perfume
  In many a rich retreat,
While trees like purple censers bowed
And swung beneath a swooning cloud
  Mysteriously sweet,
Where flowers that haunt no mortal clime
Burden the Forest of Wild Thyme.

We'd watched the bats and beetles flit
  Through sunset-coloured air
The night that we discovered it
  And all the heavens were bare:
We'd seen the colours melt and pass

Like silent ghosts across the grass
  To sleep — our hearts knew where;
And so we rose, and hand in hand
We sought the gates of fairy-land.

For Peterkin, oh Peterkin,
  The cry was in our ears,
A fairy clamour, clear and thin
  From lands beyond the years;
A wistful note, a dying fall
As of the fairy bugle-call
  Some dreamful changeling hears,
And pines within his mortal home
Once more through fairy-land to roam.
We left behind the pleasant row
  Of cottage window-panes,
The village inn's red-curtained glow,
  The lovers in the lanes;
And stout of heart and strong of will

We climbed the purple perfumed hill,
  And hummed the sweet refrains
Of fairy tunes the tall thin man
Taught us of old in Old Japan.

So by the tall wide-barred church-gate
  Through which we all could pass
We came to where that curious plate,
  That foolish plate of brass,
Said Peterkin was fast asleep
Beneath a cold and ugly heap
  Of earth and stones and grass.
It was a splendid place for play,
That churchyard, on a summer's day;

A splendid place for hide-and-seek
  Between the grey old stones;
Where even grown-ups used to speak
  In awestruck whispering tones;

And here and there the grass ran wild
In jungles for the creeping child,
  And there were elfin zones
Of twisted flowers and words in rhyme
And great sweet cushions of wild thyme.

So in a wild thyme snuggery there
  We stayed awhile to rest;
A bell was calling folk to prayer:
  One star was in the West:
The cottage lights grew far away,
The whole sky seemed to waver and sway
  Above our fragrant nest;
And from a distant dreamland moon
Once more we heard that fairy tune:

Why, mother once had sung it us
  When, ere we went to bed,
She told the tale of Pyramus,

How Thisbe found him dead
And mourned his eyes as green as leeks,
His cherry nose, his cowslip cheeks.

That tune would oft around us float
Since on a golden noon
We saw the play that Shakespeare wrote
Of Lion, Wall, and Moon;
Ah, hark — the ancient fairy theme —
Following darkness like a dream!

The very song Will Shakespeare sang,
The music that through Sherwood rang
And Arden and that forest glade
Where Hermie and Lysander strayed,
And Puck cried out with impish glee,
Lord, what fools these mortals be!
Though the masquerade was mute
Of Quince and Snout and Snug and Flute,

And Bottom with his donkey's head
Decked with roses, white and red,
Though the fairies had forsaken
Sherwood now and faintly shaken
The forest-scents from off their feet,
Yet from some divine retreat
Came the music, sweet and clear,
To hang upon the raptured ear
With the free unfettered sway
Of blossoms in the moon of May.
Hark! the luscious fluttering
Of flower-soft words that kiss and cling,
And part again with sweet farewells,
And rhyme and chime like fairy-bells.

"I know a bank where the wild thyme blows
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine."

Out of the undiscovered land
  So sweetly rang the song,
We dreamed we wandered, hand in hand,
  The fragrant aisles along,
Where long ago had gone to dwell
In some enchanted distant dell
  The outlawed fairy throng
When out of Sherwood's wildest glen
They sank, forsaking mortal men.

And as we dreamed, the shadowy ground
  Seemed gradually to swell;
And a strange forest rose around,
  But how — we could not tell —
Purple against a rose-red sky
The big boughs brooded silently:
  Far off we heard a bell;
And, suddenly, a great red light
Smouldered before our startled sight.

Then came a cry, a fiercer flash,
  And down between the trees
We saw great crimson figures crash,
  Wild-eyed monstrosities;
Great dragon-shapes that breathed a flame
From roaring nostrils as they came:
  We sank upon our knees;
And looming o'er us, ten yards high,
Like battleships they thundered by.

And then, as down that mighty dell
  We followed, faint with fear,
We understood the tolling bell
  That called the monsters there;
For right in front we saw a house
Woven of wild mysterious boughs
  Bursting out everywhere
In crimson flames, and with a shout
The monsters rushed to put it out.

And, in a flash, the truth was ours;
  And there we knew — we knew —
The meaning of those trees like flowers,
  Those boughs of rose and blue,
And from the world we'd left above
A voice came crooning like a dove
  To prove the dream was true:
And this — we knew it by the rhyme
Must be — the Forest of Wild Thyme.

For out of the mystical rose-red dome
  Of heaven the voice came murmuring down:
Oh, Ladybird, Ladybird, fly away home;
  Your house is on fire and your children are
    gone.

We knew, we knew it by the rhyme,
  Though *we* seemed, after all,
No tinier, yet the sweet wild thyme

Towered like a forest tall
All round us; oh, we knew not how,
And yet — we knew those monsters now:
Our dream's divine recall
Had dwarfed us, as with magic words;
The dragons were but ladybirds!

And all around us as we gazed,
Half glad, half frightened, all amazed,
The scented clouds of purple smoke
In lurid gleams of crimson broke;
And o'er our heads the huge black trees
Obscured the sky's red mysteries;
While here and there gigantic wings
Beat o'er us, and great scaly things
Fold over monstrous leathern fold
Out of the smouldering copses rolled;
And eyes like blood-red pits of flame
From many a forest-cavern came

To glare across the blazing glade,
Till, with the sudden thought dismayed,
We wondered if we e'er should find
The mortal home we left behind:
Fear clutched us in a grisly grasp,
We gave one wild and white-lipped gasp,
Then turned and ran, with streaming hair,
Away, away, and anywhere!

And hurry-skurry, heart and heel and hand,
we tore along,
And still our flying feet kept time and pattered on for Peterkin,
For Peterkin, oh Peterkin, it made a kind of song
To prove the road was right although it seemed so dark and wrong,
As through the desperate woods we plunged and ploughed for little Peterkin,

Where many a hidden jungle-beast made
noises like a gong
That rolled and roared and rumbled as we
rushed along to Peterkin.

Peterkin, Peterkin, if you could only hear
And answer us; one little word from little
lonely Peterkin
To take and comfort father, he is sitting in his
chair
In the library: he's listening for your footstep
on the stair
And your patter down the passage, he can
only think of Peterkin:
Come back, come back to father, for to-day
he'd let us tear
His newest book to make a paper-boat for
little Peterkin.

PART III

THE HIDEOUS HERMIT

Ah, what wonders round us rose
  When we dared to pause and look,
Curious things that seemed all toes,
  Goblins from a picture-book;
Ants like witches, four feet high,
  Waving all their skinny arms,
Glared at us and wandered by,
  Muttering their ancestral charms.

Stately forms in green and gold
  Armour strutted through the glades,
Just as Hamlet's ghost, we're told,
  Mooned among the midnight shades:

Once a sort of devil came
  Scattering broken trees about,
Winged with leather, eyed with flame, —
  He was but a moth, no doubt.

Here and there, above us clomb
  Feathery clumps of palm on high:
Those were ferns, of course, but some
  Really seemed to touch the sky;
Yes; and down one fragrant glade,
  Listening as we onward stole,
Half delighted, half afraid,
  Dong, we heard the hare-bells toll!

Something told us what that gleam
  Down the glen was brooding o'er;
Something told us in a dream
  What the bells were tolling for!
Something told us there was fear,

Horror, peril, on our way!
Was it far or was it near?
Near, we heard the night-wind say.

Toll, the music reeled and pealed
Through the vast and sombre trees,
Where a rosy light revealed
Dimmer, sweeter mysteries;
And, like petals of the rose,
Fairy fans in beauty beat,
Light in light — ah, what were those
Rhymes we heard the night repeat?

Toll, a dream within a dream,
Up an aisle of rose and blue,
Up the music's perfumed stream
Came the words, and then we knew,
Knew that in that distant glen
Once again the case was tried,

Hark! — *Who killed Cock Robin, then?*
And a tiny voice replied,
"*I*
killed
Cock
Robin!"

"*I!* And who are *You*, sir, pray?"
Growled a voice that froze our marrow:
"Who!" we heard the murderer say,
"Lord, sir, I'm the famous Sparrow,
And this 'ere's my bow and arrow!
I
killed
Cock
Robin!"

Then, with one great indrawn breath,
Such a sighin' and a sobbin'

Rose all round us for the death
  Of poor, poor Cock Robin,
Oh, we couldn't bear to wait
Even to hear the murderer's fate,
Which we'd often wished to know
Sitting in the fireside glow
And with hot revengeful looks
Searched for in the nursery-books;
For the Robin and the Wren
Are such friends to mortal men,
  Such dear friends to mortal men!

Toll; and through the woods once more
  Stole we, drenched with fragrant dew:
  Toll; the hare-bell's burden bore
  Deeper meanings than we knew:
Still it told us there was fear,
  Horror, peril on our way!
Was it far or was it near?
  Near, we heard the night-wind say!

Near; and once or twice we saw
  Something like a monstrous eye,
Something like a hideous claw
  Steal between us and the sky:
Still we hummed a dauntless tune
  Trying to think such things might be
Glimpses of the fairy moon
  Hiding in some hairy tree.

Yet around us as we went
  Through the glades of rose and blue
Sweetness with the horror blent
  Wonder-wild in scent and hue:
Here Aladdin's cavern yawned,
  Jewelled thick with gorgeous dyes;
There a head of clover dawned
  Like a cloud in eastern skies.

Hills of topaz, lakes of dew,

Fairy cliffs of crystal sheen
Passed we; and the forest's blue
Sea of branches tossed between:
Once we saw a gryphon make
One soft iris as it passed
Like the curving meteor's wake
O'er the forest, far and fast.

Winged with purple, breathing flame,
Crimson-eyed we saw him go,
Where — ah! could it be the same
Cockchafer we used to know? —
Valley-lilies overhead,
High aloof in clustered spray,
Far through heaven their splendour spread,
Glimmering like the Milky Way.

Mammoths father calls "extinct,"
Creatures that the cave-men feared,

Through that forest walked and blinked,
  Through that jungle crawled and leered;
Beasts no Nimrod ever knew,
  Woolly bears of black and red;
Crocodiles, we wondered who
  Ever dared to see *them* fed.

Were they lizards? If they were,
  They could swallow *us* with ease;
But they slumbered quietly there
  In among the mighty trees;
Red and silver, blue and green,
  Played the moonlight on their scales;
Golden eyes they had, and lean
  Crookéd legs with cruel nails.

Yet again, oh, faint and far,
  Came the shadow of a cry,
Like the calling of a star

To its brother in the sky;
Like an echo in a cave
Where young mermen sound their shells,
Like the wind across a grave
Bright with scent of lily-bells.

Like a fairy hunter's horn
Sounding in some purple glen
Sweet revelly to the morn
And the fairy quest again:
Then, all round it surged a song
We could never understand
Though it lingered with us long,
And it seemed so sad and grand.

SONG

Little Boy Blue, come blow up your horn,
Summon the day of deliverance in:
We are weary of bearing the burden of scorn

As we yearn for the home that we never shall win;
For here there is weeping and sorrow and sin,
And the poor and the weak are a spoil for the strong!
Ah! when shall the song of the ransomed begin?
The world is grown weary with waiting so long.

Little Boy Blue, you are gallant and brave,
There was never a doubt in those clear bright eyes;
Come, challenge the grim dark Gates of the Grave
As the skylark sings to those infinite skies!
This world is a dream, say the old and the wise,
And its rainbows arise o'er the false and the true;
But the mists of the morning are made of our sighs,—

Ah, shatter them, scatter them, Little Boy Blue!

Little Boy Blue, if the child-heart knows,
Sound but a note as a little one may;
And the thorns of the desert shall bloom with the rose,
And the Healer shall wipe all tears away;
Little Boy Blue, we are all astray,
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn,
Ah, set the world right, as a little one may;
Little Boy Blue, come blow up your horn!

Yes; and there between the trees
Circled with a misty gleam
Like the light a mourner sees
Round an angel in a dream;
Was it he? oh, brave and slim,

Straight and clad in æry blue,
Lifting to his lips the dim
Golden horn? We never knew!

Never; for a witch's hair
Flooded all the moonlit sky,
And he vanished, then and there,
In the twinkling of an eye:
Just as either boyish cheek
Puffed to set the world aright,
Ere the golden horn could speak
Round him flowed the purple night.

* * * * *

At last we came to a round black road
That tunnelled through the woods and showed,
Or so we thought, a good clear way
Back to the upper lands of day;
Great silken cables overhead

In many a mighty mesh were spread
Netting the rounded arch, no doubt
To keep the weight of leafage out.
And, as the tunnel narrowed down,
So thick and close the cords had grown
No leaf could through their meshes stray,
And the faint moonlight died away;
Only a strange grey glimmer shone
To guide our weary footsteps on,
Until, tired out, we stood before
The end, a great grey silken door.

Then from out a weird old wicket, overgrown
with shaggy hair
Like a weird and wicked eyebrow round a
weird and wicked eye,
Two great eyeballs and a beard
For one ghastly moment peered
At our faces with a sudden stealthy stare:

Then the door was opened wide,
And a hideous hermit cried
With a shy and soothing smile from out his lair,
Won't you walk into my parlour? I can make you cosy there!

And we couldn't quite remember where we'd heard that phrase before,
As the great grey-bearded ogre stood beside his open door;
But an echo seemed to answer from a land beyond the sky —
Won't you walk into my parlour? said the spider to the fly!

Then we looked a little closer at the ogre as he stood
With his great red eyeballs glowing like two torches in a wood,

And his mighty speckled belly and his dreadful clutching claws,
And his nose — a horny parrot's beak, his whiskers and his jaws;
Yet he seemed so sympathetic, and we saw two tears descend,
As he murmured, "I'm so ugly, but I've lost my dearest friend!
I tell you most lymphatic'ly, I've yearnings in my soul," —
And right along his parrot's beak we saw the tear-drops roll;
He's an arrant sentimentalist, we heard a distant sigh,
Won't you weep upon my bosom? said the spider to the fly.

"If you'd dreamed my dreams of beauty, if you'd seen my works of art,

If you'd felt the cruel hunger that is gnawing
at my heart,
And the grief that never leaves me and the
love I can't forget,
(For I loved with all the letters in the Chinese
alphabet!)
Oh, you'd all come in to comfort me: you
ought to help the weak;
And I'm full of melting moments; and — I —
know — the — thing — you — seek!"
And the haunting echo answered, *Well, I'm
sure you ought to try;*
*There's a duty to one's neighbour, said the spider
to the fly.*

So we walked into his parlour
Though a gleam was in his eye;
And it *was* the prettiest parlour
That ever we did spy!

But we saw by the uncertain
  Misty light, shot through with gleams
Of many a silken curtain
  Broidered o'er with dreadful dreams,
That he locked the door behind us! So we
    stood with bated breath
In a silence deep as death.

There were scarlet gleams and crimson
  In the curious foggy grey,
Like the blood-red light that swims on
  Old canals at fall of day,
Where the smoke of some great city loops and
    droops in gorgeous veils
Round the heavy purple barges' tawny sails.

Were those creatures gagged and muffled
  See — there — by that severed head?
Was it but a breeze that ruffled

Those dark curtains, splashed with red,
Ruffled the dark figures on them, made them moan like things in pain?
How we wished that we were safe at home again.

* * * * *

"Oh, we want to hear of Peterkin; good sir, you say you know;
Won't you tell us, won't you put us in the way we want to go?"
So we pleaded, for he seemed so very full of sighs and tears
That we couldn't doubt his kindness, and we smothered all our fears;
But he said, "You must be crazy if you come to me for help;
Why should I desire to send you to your horrid little whelp?"
And again the foolish echo made a far-away reply,

Oh, don't come to me for comfort,
Pray don't look to me for comfort,
Heavens! you mustn't be so selfish, said the spider to the fly.

"Still, when the King of Scotland, so to speak, was in a hole,
He was aided by my brother: it's a story to console
The convict on the treadmill and the infant with a sum,
For it teaches you to try again until your kingdom's come!
The monarch dawdled in that hole for centuries of time
Until my own twin-brother rose and showed him how to climb:
He showed him how to swing and sway upon a tiny thread

Across a mighty precipice, and light upon his head
Without a single fracture and without a single pain
If he only did it frequently and tried and tried again:"
And once again the whisper like a moral wandered by,
Perseverance is a virtue, said the spider to the fly.

Then he moaned, "My heart is hungry; but I fear I cannot eat,
(Of course I speak entirely now of spiritual meat!)
For I only fed an hour ago, but if we calmly sat
While I told you all my troubles in a confidential chat

It would give me *such* an appetite to hear you
sympathise,
And I should sleep the better — see, the tears
are in my eyes!
Dead yearnings are such dreadful things, let's
keep 'em all alive, —
Let's sit and talk awhile, my dears; we'll
dine, I think, at five."
And he brought his chair beside us in his most
engaging style,
And began to tell his story with a melancholy
smile. —

"You remember Miss Muffet
Who sat on a tuffet
Partaking of curds and whey;
Well, *I* am the spider
Who sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away!

There was nothing against her!
An elderly spinster
  Were such a grammatical mate
For a spider and spinner,
I swore I would win her,
I knew I had met with my fate!

That love was the purest
And strongest and surest
  I'd felt since my first thread was spun;
I know I'm a bogey,
But *she's* an old fogey,
  So why in the world did she run?
When Bruce was in trouble,
A spider, my double,
  Encouraged him greatly, they say!
Now, *why* should the spider
Who sat down beside her
  Have frightened Miss Muffet away?"

He seemed to have much more to tell,
But we could scarce be listening well,
Although we tried with all our might
To look attentive and polite;
For still afar we heard the thin
Clear fairy-call to Peterkin;
Clear as a skylark's mounting song
It drew our wandering thoughts along.
Afar, it seemed, yet, ah, so nigh,
Deep in our dreams it scaled the sky,
In captive dreams that brooked no bars
It touched the love that moves the stars,
And with sweet music's golden tether
It bound our hearts and heaven together.

Song

Wake, arise, the lake, the skies
Fade into the faery day;
Come and sing before our king,

Heed not Time, the dotard grey;
Time has given his crown to heaven —
Ah, how long? Awake, away!

Then, as the Hermit rambled on
In one long listless monotone,
We heard a wild and mournful groan
Come rumbling down the tunnelled way;
A voice, an awful mournful bray,
Singing some old funereal lay;
Then solemn footsteps, muffled, dull,
Approached as if they trod on wool,
And as they nearer, nearer drew,
We saw our Host was listening too!

His bulging eyes began to glow
Like great red match-heads rubbed at night,
And then he stole with a grim "O-ho!"
To that grey old wicket where, out of sight,

Blandly rubbing his hands and humming,
He could see, at one glance, whatever was
coming.

He had never been so jubilant or frolicsome
before,
As he scurried on his cruel hairy crutches to
the door;
And flung it open wide
And most hospitably cried,
"Won't you walk into my parlour? I've
some little friends to tea, —
They'll be highly entertaining to a man of
sympathy,
Such as you yourself must be!"

Then the man, for so he seemed,
(Doubtless one who'd lost his way
And was dwarfed as we had been!)

In his ancient suit of black,
Black upon the verge of green,
Entered like a ghost that dreamed
Sadly of some bygone day;
And he never ceased to sing
In that awful mournful bray.

The door closed behind his back;
He walked round us in a ring,
And we hoped that he might free us,
But his tears appeared to blind him,
For he didn't seem to see us,
And the Hermit crept behind him
Like a cat about to spring.

And the song he sang was this;
And his nose looked very grand
As he sang it, with a bliss
Which we could not understand;

For his voice was very sad,
While his nose was proud and glad.

Rain, April, rain, thy sunny, sunny tears!
Through the black boughs the robe of Spring
appears,
Yet, for the ghosts of all the bygone years,
Rain, April, rain.

Rain, April, rain; the rose will soon be glad;
Spring will rejoice, a Spring I, too, have had;
A little while, till I no more be sad,
Rain, April, rain.

And then the spider sprang
Before we could breathe or speak,
And one great scream out-rang
As the terrible horny beak
Crunched into the Sad Man's head,

And the terrible hairy claws
Clutched him around his middle;
And he opened his lantern-jaws,
And he gave one twist, one twiddle,
One kick, and his sorrow was dead.

And there, as he sucked his bleeding prey,
The spider leered at us — "You will do,
My sweet little dears, for another day;
But this is the sort I like; huh! huh!"

And there we stood, in frozen fear,
Whiter than death,
With bated breath;
And lo! as we thought of Peterkin,
Father and home and Peterkin,
Once more that music clear and thin,
Clear as a skylark's mounting song,
But nearer now, more sweet, more strong,
Drew all our wandering thoughts along,

Until it seemed, a mystic sea
Of hidden delight and harmony
Began to ripple and rise all round
The prison where our hearts lay bound;
And from sweet heaven's most rosy rim
There swelled a distant marching hymn
Which made the hideous Hermit pause
And listen with lank down-dropt jaws,
Till, with great bulging eyes of fear,
He sought the wicket again to peer
Along the tunnel, as like sweet rain
We heard the still approaching strain,
And, under it, the rhythmic beat
Of multitudinous marching feet.
Nearer, nearer, they rippled and rang,
And this was the marching song they sang: —

SONG

A fairy band are we
In fairy-land:

Singing march we, hand in hand;
Singing, singing all day long:
(Some folk never heard a fairy-song!)

Singing, singing,
When the merry thrush is swinging
On a springing spray;
Or when the witch that lives in gloomy caves
And creeps by night among the graves
Calls a cloud across the day;
Cease we never our fairy song,
March we ever, along, along,
Down the dale, or up the hill,
Singing, singing still.

And suddenly the Hermit turned and ran with all his might
Through the back-door of his parlour as we thought of little Peterkin;

And the great grey roof was shattered by a
shower of rosy light,
And the spider-house went floating, torn and
tattered through the night
In a flight of prismy streamers, as a shout
went up for Peterkin;
And lo, the glistening fairy-host stood there
arrayed for fight,
In arms of rose and green and gold, to lead
us on to Peterkin.

And all around us, rippling like a pearl and
opal sea,
The host of fairy faces winked a kindly hint
of Peterkin;
And all around the rosy glade a laugh of fairy
glee
Watched spider-streamers floating up from
fragrant tree to tree

Till the moonlight caught the gossamers and,
oh we wished for Peterkin!
Each rope became a rainbow; but it made us
ache to see
Such a fairy forest-pomp without explaining
it to Peterkin.

Then all the glittering crowd
With a courtly gesture bowed
Like a rosy jewelled cloud
Round a flame,
As the King of Fairy-land,
Very dignified and grand,
Stepped forward to demand
Whence we came.

He'd a cloak of gold and green
Such as caterpillars spin,
For the fairy ways, I ween,

Are very frugal;
He'd a bow that he had borne
Since the crimson Eden morn,
And a honeysuckle horn
For his bugle.

So we told our tale of faëry to the King of Fairy-land,
And asked if he could let us know the latest news of Peterkin;
And he turned him with a courtly smile and waved his jewelled wand
And cried, *Pease-blossom, Mustard-seed! You know the old command;*
Well; these are little children; you must lead them on to Peterkin.
Then he knelt, the King of Faëry knelt; his eyes were great and grand
As he took our hands and kissed them, saying, *Father loves your Peterkin!*

So out they sprang, on either side,
A light fantastic fairy guide,
To lead us to the land unknown
Where little Peterkin was gone;
And, as we went with timid pace,
We saw that every fairy face
In all that moonlit host was wet
With tears: we never shall forget
The mystic hush that seemed to fade
Away like sound, as down the glade
We passed beyond their zone of light.
Then through the forest's purple night
We trotted, at a pleasant speed,
With gay Pease-blossom and Mustard-seed.

PART IV

PEASE-BLOSSOM AND MUSTARD-SEED

SHYLY we surveyed our guides
As through the gloomy woods we went
In the light that the straggling moonbeams
lent:
We envied them their easy strides!
Pease-blossom in his crimson cap
And delicate suit of rose-leaf green,
His crimson sash and his jewelled dagger,
Strutted along with an elegant swagger
Which showed that he didn't care one rap
For anything less than a Fairy Queen:
His eyes were deep like the eyes of a poet,
Although his crisp and curly hair
Certainly didn't seem to show it!

While Mustard-seed was a devil-may-care
Epigrammatic and pungent fellow
Clad in a splendid suit of yellow,
With emerald stars on his glittering breast
And eyes that shone with a diamond light:
They made you feel sure it would always be best
To tell him the truth: he was not perhaps *quite*
So polite as Pease-blossom, but then who could be
Quite such a debonair fairy as he?

We never could tell you one-half that we heard
And saw on that journey. For instance, a bird
Ten times as big as an elephant stood
By the side of a nest like a great thick wood:
The clouds in glimmering wreaths were spread

Behind its vast and shadowy head
Which rolled at us trembling below. (Its eyes
Were like great black moons in those pearl-
pale skies.)
And we feared he might take us, perhaps, for
a worm.

But he ruffled his breast with the sound of a
storm,
And snuggled his head with a careless disdain
Under his huge hunched wing again;
And Mustard-seed said, as we stole thro' the
dark,
There was nothing to fear: it was only a Lark!

And so he cheered the way along
With many a neat little epigram,
While dear Pease-blossom before him swam
On a billow of lovely moonlit song,

Telling us why they had left their home
In Sherwood, and had hither come
To dwell in this magical scented clime,
This dim old Forest of sweet Wild Thyme.

"Men toil," he said, "from morn till night
With bleeding hands and blinded sight
For gold, more gold! They have betrayed
The trust that in their souls was laid;
Their fairy birthright they have sold
For little disks of mortal gold;
And now they cannot even see
The gold upon the greenwood tree,
The wealth of coloured lights that pass
In soft gradations through the grass,
The riches of the love untold
That wakes the day from grey to gold;
And howsoe'er the moonlight weaves
Magic webs among the leaves

Englishmen care little now
For elves beneath the hawthorn bough:
Nor if Robin should return
Dare they of an outlaw learn;
For them the Smallest Flower is furled,
Mute is the music of the world;
And unbelief has driven away
Beauty from the blossomed spray."

Then Mustard-seed with diamond eyes
Taught us to be laughter-wise,
And he showed us how that Time
Is much less powerful than a rhyme;
And that Space is but a dream;
"For look," he said, with eyes agleam,
"Now you are become so small
You think the Thyme a forest tall;
But underneath your feet you see
A world of wilder mystery

Where, if you were smaller yet,
You would just as soon forget
This forest, which you'd leave above
As you have left the home you love!
For, since the Thyme you used to know
Seems a forest here below,
What if you should sink again
And find there stretched a mighty plain
Between each grass-blade and the next?
You'd think till you were quite perplexed!
Especially if all the flowers
That lit the sweet Thyme-forest bowers
Were in that wild transcendent change
Turned to Temples, great and strange,
With many a pillared portal high
And domes that swelled against the sky!
How foolish, then, you will agree,
Are those who think that all must see
The world alike, or those who scorn

Another who, perchance, was born
Where — in a different dream from theirs —
What they call sins to him are prayers!
We cannot judge; we cannot know;
All things mingle; all things flow;
There's only one thing constant here —
Love — that untranscended sphere:
Love, that while all ages run
Holds the wheeling worlds in one;
Love that, as your sages tell,
Soars to heaven and sinks to hell."

Even as he spoke, we seemed to grow
Smaller, the Thyme trees seemed to go
Farther away from us: new dreams
Flashed out on us with mystic gleams
Of mighty Temple-domes: deep awe
Held us all breathless as we saw
A carven portal glimmering out

Between new flowers that put to rout
Our other fancies: in sweet fear
We tiptoed past, and seemed to hear
A sound of singing from within
That told our souls of Peterkin:
Our thoughts of *him* were still the same
Howe'er the shadows went and came!
So, on we wandered, hand in hand,
And all the world was fairy-land.

* * * * *

And as we went we seemed to hear
  Surging up from distant dells
A solemn music, soft and clear
  As if a field of lily-bells
Were tolling all together, sweet
  But sad and low and keeping time
To multitudinous marching feet
With a slow funereal beat
  And a deep harmonious chime

That told us by its dark refrain
The reason fairies suffered pain.

SONG

Bear her along
Keep ye your song
Tender and sweet and low:
Fairies must die!
Ask ye not why
Ye that have hurt her so.
Passing away—flower from the spray! Colour
and light from the leaf!
Soon, soon will the year shed its bloom on her
bier, and the dust of its dreams on our grief.

Men upon earth
Bring us to birth
Gently at even and morn!
When as brother and brother
They greet one another

And smile — then a fairy is born!
  But at each cruel word
  Upon earth that is heard,
Each deed of unkindness or hate,
  Some fairy must pass
  From the games in the grass
And steal thro' the terrible Gate.

Passing away — flower from the spray! Colour and light from the leaf!
Soon, soon will the year shed its bloom on her bier, and the dust of its dreams on our grief.

  If ye knew, if ye knew
  All the wrong that ye do
By the thought that ye harbour alone,
  How the face of some fairy
  Grows wistful and weary
And the heart in her cold as a stone!

Ah, she was born
Blithe as the morn
Under an April sky,
Born of the greeting
Of two lovers meeting!
They parted, and so she must die!
Passing away — flower from the spray! Colour and light from the leaf!
Soon, soon will the year shed its bloom on her bier, and the dust of its dreams on our grief.

Cradled in blisses,
Yea, born of your kisses,
Oh, ye lovers that met by the moon,
She would not have cried
In the darkness and died
If ye had not forgotten so soon!

Cruel mortals, they say,

Live for ever and aye,
And they pray in the dark on their knees!
But the flowers that are fled
And the loves that are dead,
What heaven takes pity on these?

Bear her along — singing your song — tender
and sweet and low!
Fairies must die! Ask ye not why — ye that
have hurt her so.

Passing away —
Flower from the spray!
Colour and light from the leaf!
Soon, soon will the year
Shed its bloom on her bier
And the dust of its dreams on our grief!

* * * * *

Then we came through a glittering crystal grot

By a path like a pale moonbeam,
And a broad blue bridge of Forget-me-not
Over a shimmering stream,
To where, through the deep blue dusk, a gleam
Rose like the soul of the setting sun;
A sunset breaking through the earth,
A crimson sea of the poppies of dream,
Deep as the sleep that gave them birth
In the night where all earthly dreams are
done.

And then, like a pearl-pale porch of the moon,
Faint and sweet as a starlit shrine,
Over the gloom
Of the crimson bloom
We saw the Gates of Ivory shine;
And, lulled and lured by the lullaby tune
Of the cradling airs that drowsily creep
From blossom to blossom, and lazily croon

Through the heart of the midnight's mystic
noon,
We came to the Gates of the City of Sleep.

Faint and sweet as a lily's repose
On the broad black breast of a midnight
lake,
The City delighted the cradling night:
Like a straggling palace of cloud it rose;
The towers were crowned with a crystal
light
Like the starry crown of a white snowflake
As they pierced in a wild white pinnacled
crowd,
Through the dusky wreaths of enchanted cloud
That swirled all round like a witch's hair.

And we heard, as the sound of a great sea
sighing,

The sigh of the sleepless world of care;
And we saw strange shadowy figures flying
Up to the Ivory Gates and beating
With pale hands, long and famished and thin;
Like blinded birds we saw them dash
Against the cruelly gleaming wall:
We heard them wearily moan and call
With sharp starved lips for ever entreating
The pale doorkeeper to let them in.
And still, as they beat, again and again,
We saw on the moon-pale lintels a splash
Of crimson blood like a poppy-stain
Or a wild red rose from the gardens of pain
That sigh all night like a ghostly sea
From the City of Sleep to Gethsemane.

And lo, as we neared that mighty crowd
An old blind man came, crying aloud

To greet us, as once the blind man cried
In the Bible picture — you know we tried
To paint that print, with its Eastern sun;
But the reds and the yellows *would* mix and
run,
And the blue of the sky made a horrible mess
Right over the edge of the Lord's white dress.

And the old blind man, just as though he had
eyes,
Came straight to meet us; and all the cries
Of the crowd were hushed; and a strange
sweet calm
Stole through the air like a breath of the balm
That was wafted abroad from the Forest of
Thyme
(For it rolled all round that curious clime
With its magical clouds of perfumed trees.)
And the blind man cried, "Our help is at hand,

Oh, brothers, remember the old command,
Remember the frankincense and myrrh,
Make way, make way for those little ones there;
Make way, make way, I have seen them afar
Under a great white Eastern star;
For I am the mad blind man who sees!"
Then he whispered, softly — *Of such as these;*
And through the hush of the cloven crowd
We passed to the gates of the City, and there
Our fairy heralds cried aloud —
Open your Gates; don't stand and stare;
These are the Children for whom our King
Made all the star-worlds dance in a ring!

And lo, like a sorrow that melts from the heart
In tears, the slow gates melted apart;
And into the City we passed like a dream;
And then, in one splendid marching stream
The whole of that host came following through.

We were only children, just like you;
Children, ah, but we felt so grand
As we led them — although we could understand
Nothing at all of the wonderful song
That rose all round as we marched along.

SONG

You that have seen how the world and its glory
Change and grow old like the love of a friend;
You that have come to the end of the story,
You that were tired ere you came to the end;
You that are weary of laughter and sorrow,
Pain and pleasure, labour and sin,
Sick of the midnight and dreading the morrow,
Ah, come in; come in.

You that are bearing the load of the ages;
You that have loved overmuch and too late;
You that confute all the saws of the sages;

You that served only because you must wait,
Knowing your work was a wasted endeavour;
You that have lost and yet triumphed therein,
Add loss to your losses and triumph for ever;
Ah, come in; come in.

And we knew as we went up that twisted street,
With its violet shadows and pearl-pale walls,
We were coming to Something strange and sweet,
For the dim air echoed with elfin calls;
And, far away, in the heart of the City,
A murmur of laughter and revelry rose, —
A sound that was faint as the smile of Pity,
And sweet as a swan-song's golden close.

And then, once more, as we marched along,
There surged all round us that wonderful song;
And it swung to the tramp of our marching
feet;

But ah, it was tenderer now and so sweet
That it made our eyes grow wet and blind,
And the whole wide-world seem mother-kind,
Folding us round with a gentle embrace,
And pressing our souls to her soft sweet face.

Song

Dreams; dreams; ah, the memory blinding us,
Blinding our eyes to the way that we go;
Till the new sorrow come, once more reminding us
Blindly of kind hearts, ours long ago:
Mother-mine, whisper we, yours was the love for me!
Still, though our paths lie lone and apart,
Yours is the true love, shining above for me,
Yours are the kind eyes, hurting my heart.

Dreams; dreams; ah, how shall we sing of them,

Dreams that we loved with our head on her
breast:
Dreams; dreams; and the cradle-sweet swing
of them;
Ay, for her voice was the sound we loved best:
Can we remember at all or, forgetting it,
Can we recall for a moment the gleam
Of our childhood's delight and the wonder be-
getting it,
Wonder awakened in dreams of a dream?

And, once again, from the heart of the City
A murmur of tenderer laughter rose,
A sound that was faint as the smile of Pity,
And sweet as a swan-song's golden close;
And it seemed as if some wonderful Fair
Were charming the night of the City of
Dreams,
For, over the mystical din out there,

The clouds were litten with flickering gleams,
And a roseate light like the day's first flush
Quivered and beat on the towers above,
And we heard through the curious crooning hush
An elfin song that we used to love.
Little Boy Blue, come blow up your horn . . .
And the soft wind blew it the other way;
And all that we heard was — *Cow's in the corn;*
But we never heard anything half so gay!

And ever we seemed to be drawing nearer
That mystical roseate smoke-wreathed glare,
And the curious music grew louder and clearer,
Till *Mustard-Seed* said, "We are lucky, you see,
We've arrived at a time of festivity!"
And so to the end of the street we came,
And turned a corner, and — there we were,

In a place that glowed like the dawn of day,
  A crowded clamouring City square
Like the cloudy heart of an opal, aflame
  With the lights of a great Dream-Fair:
Thousands of children were gathered there,
  Thousands of old men, weary and grey,
And the shouts of the showmen filled the air—
  This way! This way! This way!

And *See-Saw; Margery Daw;* we heard a
    rollicking shout,
As the swing-boats hurtled over our heads to
    the tune of the roundabout;
And *Little Boy Blue, come blow up your horn,*
    we heard the showmen cry,
And *Dickory Dock, I'm as good as a clock,* we
    heard the swings reply.

This way, this way to your Heart's Desire;

Come, cast your burdens down;
And the pauper shall mount his throne in the skies,
And the king be rid of his crown:
And souls that were dead shall be fed with fire
From the fount of their ancient pain,
And your lost love come with the light in her eyes
Back to your heart again.

Ah, here be sure she shall never prove
Less kind than her eyes were bright;
This way, this way to your old lost love,
You shall kiss her lips to-night;
This way for the smile of a dead man's face
And the grip of a brother's hand,
This way to your childhood's heart of grace
And your home in Fairy-land.

Dickory Dock, I'm as good as a clock, d'you
hear my swivels chime?
To and fro as I come and go, I keep eternal
time.
O, little Bo-peep, if you've lost your sheep
and don't know where to find 'em,
Leave 'em alone and they'll come home, and
carry their tails behind 'em.

And *See-Saw; Margery Daw;* there came the
chorussing shout,
As the swing-boats answered the roaring tune
of the rollicking roundabout;
Dickory, dickory, dickory, dock, d'you hear
my swivels chime?
Swing; swing; you're as good as a king if
you keep eternal time.

Then we saw that the tunes of the world were
one;

And the metre that guided the rhythmic sun
Was at one, like the ebb and the flow of the
sea,
With the tunes that we learned at our mother's
knee;
The beat of the horse-hoofs that carried us
down
To see the fine Lady of Banbury Town;
And so, by the rhymes that we knew, we could
tell
Without knowing the others — that all was
well.

And then, our brains began to spin;
For it seemed as if that mighty din
Were no less than the cries of the poets and
sages
Of all the nations in all the ages;
And, if they could only beat out the whole

Of their music together, the guerdon and goal
Of the world would be reached with one mighty
shout,
And the dark dread secret of Time be out;
And nearer, nearer they seemed to climb,
And madder and merrier rose the song,
And the swings and the see-saws marked the
time;
For this was the maddest and merriest
throng
That ever was met on a holy-day
To dance the dust of the world away;
And madder and merrier, round and round
The whirligigs whirled to the whirling sound,
Till it seemed that the mad song burst its bars
And mixed with the song of the whirling stars,
The song that the rhythmic Time-Tides tell
To seraphs in Heaven and devils in Hell;
Ay; Heaven and Hell in accordant chime

With the universal rhythm and rhyme
Were nearing the secret of Space and Time;
The song of that ultimate mystery
Which only the mad blind men who see,
Led by the laugh of a little child,
Can utter; Ay, wilder and yet more wild
It maddened, till now — full song — it was out!
It roared from the starry roundabout —

A child was born in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem,
in Bethlehem,
A child was born in Bethlehem; ah, hear my
fairy fable;
For I have seen the King of Kings, no longer
thronged with angel wings,
But croodling like a little babe, and cradled
in a stable.
The wise men came to greet him with their gifts
of myrrh and frankincense, —

Gold and myrrh and frankincense they brought
to make him mirth;
And would you know the way to win to little
brother Peterkin,
My childhood's heart shall guide you through
the glories of the earth.

A child was born in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem,
in Bethlehem;
The wise men came to welcome him: a star
stood o'er the gable;
And there they saw the Kings of Kings, no longer
thronged with angel wings,
But croodling like a little babe, and cradled
in a stable.

And creeping through the music once again
the fairy cry
Came freezing o'er the snowy towers to lead
us on to Peterkin:

Once more the fairy bugles blew from lands
beyond the sky,
And we all groped out together, dazed and
blind, we knew not why;
Out through the City's farther gates we went
to look for Peterkin;
Out, out into the dark Unknown, and heard
the clamour die
Far, far away behind us as we trotted on
to Peterkin.

Then once more along the rare
Forest-paths we groped our way:
Here the glow-worm's league-long glare
Turned the Wild Thyme night to day:
There we passed a sort of whale
Sixty feet in length or more,
But we knew it was a snail
Even when we heard it snore.

Often through the glamorous gloom
  Almost on the top of us
We beheld a beetle loom
  Like a hippopotamus;
Once or twice a spotted toad
  Like a mountain wobbled by
With a rolling moon that glowed
  Through the skin-fringe of its eye.

Once a caterpillar bowed
  Down a leaf of Ygdrasil
Like a sunset-coloured cloud
  Sleeping on a quiet hill:
Once we came upon a moth
  Fast asleep with outspread wings,
Like a mighty tissued cloth
  Woven for the feet of kings.

There above the woods in state

Many a temple dome that glows
Delicately like a great
Rainbow-coloured bubble rose:
Though they were but flowers on earth,
Oh, we dared not enter in;
For in that divine re-birth
Less than awe were more than sin!

Yet their mystic anthems came
Sweetly to our listening ears;
And their burden was the same —
"No more sorrow, no more tears!
Whither Peterkin has gone
You, assuredly, shall go:
When your wanderings are done,
All he knows you, too, shall know!"

So we thought we'd onward roam
Till earth's Smallest Flower appeared,

With a less tremendous dome
  Less divinely to be feared:
Then, perchance, if we should dare
  Timidly to enter in,
Might some kindly doorkeeper
  Give us news of Peterkin.

At last we saw a crimson porch
Far away, like a dull red torch
Burning in the purple gloom;
And a great ocean of perfume
Rolled round us as we drew anear,
And then we strangely seemed to hear
The shadow of a mighty psalm,
  A sound as if a golden sea
Of music swung in utter calm
  Against the shores of Eternity;
And then we saw the mighty dome
  Of some mysterious Temple tower

On high; and knew that we had come,
  At last, to that sweet House of Grace
  Which wise men find in every place —
  The Temple of the Smallest Flower.

And there — alas — our fairy friends
Whispered, "Here our kingdom ends:
  You must enter in alone,
But your souls will surely show
  Whither Peterkin is gone
And the road that you must go:
  We, poor fairies, have no souls!
  Hark, the warning hare-bell tolls;"
So "Good-bye, good-bye," they said,
"Dear little seekers-for-the-dead."
They vanished; ah, but as they went
We heard their voices softly blent
In some mysterious fairy song
That seemed to make us wise and strong;

For it was like the holy calm
That fills the bosomed rose with balm,
Or blessings that the twilight breathes
Where the honeysuckle wreathes
Between young lovers and the sky
As on banks of flowers they lie;
And with wings of rose and green
Laughing fairies pass unseen,
Singing their sweet lullaby, —
    Lulla-lulla-lullaby!
    Lulla-lulla-lullaby!
        Ah, good night, with lullaby!

* * * * *

Only a flower? Those carven walls,
Those cornices and coronals,
The splendid crimson porch, the thin
Strange sounds of singing from within —
Through the scented arch we stept,
  Pushed back the soft petallic door,

And down the velvet aisles we crept;
  Was it a Flower — no more?

For one of the voices that we heard,
A child's voice, clear as the voice of a bird,
Was it not? — nay, it could not be!
And a woman's voice that tenderly
Answered him in fond refrain,
And pierced our hearts with sweet sweet pain,
As if dear Mary-mother hung
Above some little child, and sung
Between the waves of that golden sea
The cradle-songs of Eternity;
And, while in her deep smile he basked,
Answered whatsoe'er he asked.

What is there hid in the heart of a rose,
Mother-mine?
Ah, who knows, who knows, who knows?

A man that died on a lonely hill
May tell you, perhaps, but none other will,
Little child.

What does it take to make a rose,
Mother-mine?
The God that died to make it knows
It takes the world's eternal wars,
It takes the moon and all the stars,
It takes the might of heaven and hell
And the everlasting Love as well,
Little child.

But there, in one great shrine apart
Within the Temple's holiest heart,
We came upon a blinding light,
  Suddenly, and a burning throne
Of pinnacled glory, wild and white;
  We could not see Who reigned thereon;

For, all at once, as a wood-bird sings,
The aisles were full of great white wings
Row above mystic burning row;
And through the splendour and the glow
We saw four angels, great and sweet,
With outspread wings and folded feet,
Come gliding down from a heaven within
  The golden heart of Paradise;
  And in their hands, with laughing eyes,
Lay little brother Peterkin.

And all around the Temple of the Smallest of
    the Flowers
  The glory of the angels made a star for little
    Peterkin;
For all the Kings of Splendour and all the
    Heavenly Powers
Were gathered there together in the fairy
    forest bowers

With all their globed and radiant wings to
make a star for Peterkin,
The star that shone upon the East, a star that
still is ours,
Whene'er we hang our stockings up, a star
of wings for Peterkin.

Then all, in one great flash, was gone —
A voice cried, "Hush, all's well!"
And we stood dreaming there alone,
In darkness. Who can tell
The mystic quiet that we felt,
As if the woods in worship knelt,
Far off we heard a bell
Tolling strange human folk to prayer
Through fields of sunset-coloured air.

And then a voice, "Why, here they are!"
And — as it seemed — we woke;

The sweet old skies, great star by star
  Upon our vision broke;
Field over field of heavenly blue
Rose o'er us; then a voice we knew
  Softly and gently spoke —
"See, they are sleeping by the side
Of that dear little one — who died."

PART V

THE HAPPY ENDING

We told dear father all our tale
  That night before we went to bed,
And at the end his face grew pale,
  And he bent over us and said
(Was it not strange?) he, too, was there,
  A weary, weary watch to keep
  Before the gates of the City of Sleep;
But, ere we came, he did not dare
  Even to dream of entering in,
  Or even to hope for Peterkin.
He was the poor blind man, he said,
And we — how low he bent his head!
Then he called mother near; and low
He whispered to us — "Prompt me now;

For I forget that song we heard,
But you remember every word."
Then memory came like a breaking morn,
And we breathed it to him — *A child was born!*
And there he drew us to his breast
And softly murmured all the rest. —

The wise men came to greet him with their gifts
of myrrh and frankincense, —
Gold and myrrh and frankincense they brought
to make him mirth;
And would you know the way to win to little
brother Peterkin,
My childhood's heart shall guide you through
the glories of the earth.

Then he looked up and mother knelt
Beside us, oh, her eyes were bright;
Her arms were like a lovely belt

All round us as we said Good-night
To father: *he* was crying now,
But they were happy tears, somehow;
For there we saw dear mother lay
Her cheek against his cheek and say —
Hush, let me kiss those tears away.

DEDICATION

WHAT can a wanderer bring
To little ones loved like you?
You have songs of your own to sing
That are far more steadfast and true,
Crumbs of pity for birds
That flit o'er your sun-swept lawn,
Songs that are dearer than all our words
With a love that is clear as the dawn.

What should a dreamer devise,
In the depths of his wayward will,
To deepen the gleam of your eyes
Who can dance with the Sun-child still?
Yet you glanced on his lonely way,

You cheered him in dream and deed,
And his heart is o'erflowing, o'erflowing to-day
With a love that — you never will need.

What can a pilgrim teach
To dwellers in fairy-land?
Truth that excels all speech
You murmur and understand!
All he can sing you he brings;
But — one thing more if he may,
One thing more that the King of Kings
Will take from the child on the way.

Yet how can a child of the night
Brighten the light of the sun?
How can he add a delight
To the dances that never are done?
Ah, what if he struggles to turn
Once more to the sweet old skies

With praise and praise, from the fetters that
burn,
To the God that brightened your eyes?

Yes; he is weak, he will fail,
Yet, what if, in sorrows apart,
One thing, one should avail,
The cry of a grateful heart;
It has wings: they return through the night
To a sky where the light lives yet,
To the clouds that kneel on his mountain-height
And the path that his feet forget.

What if he struggles and still
Fails and struggles again?
What if his broken will
Whispers the struggle is vain?
Once at least he has risen
Because he remembered your eyes;

Once they have brought to his earthly prison
The passion of Paradise.

Kind little eyes that I love,
Eyes forgetful of mine,
In a dream I am bending above
Your sleep, and you open and shine;
And I know as my own grow blind
With a lonely prayer for your sake,
He will hear — even me — little eyes that were kind,
God bless you, asleep or awake.

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